make you feel alive

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make you feel alive

by signifier

Summary

Through the smoke, and the noise, and the grief, there's Bucky.

There's blood all down the right side of his face, but his eyes are bright, and when he sees Gale his smile is even brighter.

There are so many things he wants to say, so many things he wants to do, but there's a crowd, and Gale doesn't think he can find the right words anyway. Not here, not now. What he settles on is eloquent, and he hopes it portrays all of the feeling he puts behind it:

"What took you so long?"

Bucky's grin widens. He shrugs his shoulders up to his ears and gestures back towards the poor excuse of a plane.

"We took a detour," he says simply.

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The one where Bucky is temporarily MIA, and Gale loses his mind.

Notes

hyperfixation go brrrrrrrrrr

I just sat and wrote this in like 2 hours so if theres mistakes blame that

if you read this while listening to lizzy mcalpine's reckless driving i promise u it does no emotional damage :)

See the end of the work for more notes

John Egan flies like it's the last mission he'll ever go on, like he won't stop until he's taken everything the Boeing B-17 has to offer, and then some. Dives, harsh turns, climbing straight for the sun. The planes he returns in are often more a pile of flying metal than anything resembling a Flying Fortress. Lemmons had started a tally on one of their chalk boards for the planes he had to fix: Bucky vs The 100th.

Gale doesn't like it.

When Gale flies, it's perfect. He can't be goaded into any dangerous moves, doesn't give in when Douglass begs him to do a barrel roll. He has one goal, one destination, and he'll be damned if his men don't make it home in one piece. And each time they do. And each time he lands, he waits for the message that John never came back.

He dreams about it sometimes. Sometimes, the plane explodes. All Buck can do is sit in his own cockpit and watch the heat blur the sky, wondering which parts of the falling debris had been the last thing Bucky touched. Sometimes he manages to eject, but his chute doesn't open, or it does, but he's shot, hit, knocked by another plane. Every time, Gale wakes in a sweat and has to tread softly over to John's sleeping form, watch the rise and fall of his chest just to calm his own jackrabbit of a heart.

The ones he hates the most though, are when Bucky's just gone. His plane disappears mid-mission. Nobody sees what happened. He sits in interrogation. *No record.*

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In August, the 100th are sent on what they were calling the Schweinfurt-Regensburg mission, intent on severely slowing down the German production of aircrafts.

It's a bloodbath. *The Bloody Hundreth* plays in his head like a mantra, and he tries not to think about the other planes, the other men, the other man that might be going down all around him. He keeps his head, keeps his men calm, and gets them through it. That's all he ever sets out to do. He doesn't count on the missions going to plan, doesn't count on them ever succeeding. Getting home, though. Whether they're counting on him or not for that, he makes it his own private mission, and he doesn't like to fail.

They're one of eight Boeing's to return.

When they exit the plane, the runway is chaos. Everywhere he turns someone is injured, an engine is smoking, trucks are flying back and forth on the gravel. He searches the faces of those that made it back and feels a mixture of relief and worry with everyone he sees.

He spots Curt in the crowd, looking shaken but alive. There's blood splattered on his neck, but most of it cakes his jacket. Gale works his way through the mess of bodies and Curt's eyes lock with his. Something in the Lieutenant seems to relax.

"Yours?" Buck asks simply.

Curt shakes his head.

They're pulling a body from the plane. His heads turned, Gale can't make out who it is, and at the moment he doesn't have the stomach to ask.

"Have you seen Bucky?" He asks instead. Dread lays thick and heavy in his ribs.

"He, uh," Curt shakes himself slightly, tries to snap back into the present, "he veered off when things got heavy. I didn't see him again after that."

The world falls out from underneath Gale's feet. He simply says: "right."

Interrogation feels like a dream.

"Major John Egan?" Major Harding asks.

"No record," Curt responds.

Gale listens to it all with a detached sense of feeling. They lost thirteen planes, so many men. Part of him wonders if there's any point in continuing the fight. The other part of him thinks *any minute now, I'm going to wake up.*

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Buck sits on John's bed, turning a book about baseball over and over in his hands. It's half falling apart, a rip in the cover, bent near in half. He's seen Bucky tuck it into pockets, his waistband, his boots more than enough times to know how that happened. On the inside, he's dog-eared certain pages. A single crease in a page the only evidence

he was ever really there.

Soon, Gale keeps thinking, *I'll pack it up soon.*

Soon comes a little later than he imagines.

Curt comes tearing into the barracks. There's a light in his eyes as he pants, and when a smile spreads across his face Gale doesn't need him to say a thing.

The plane is shot to hell, one wing blown nearly off. They must have landed rough, with no landing gear down to help them. The plane is swarmed by Lemmons and his crew, by the men who want to know who made it home after curfew, and through the smoke, and the noise, and the grief, there's Bucky.

There's blood all down the right side of his face, but his eyes are bright, and when he sees Gale his smile is even brighter.

There are so many things he wants to say, so many things he wants to do, but there's a crowd, and Gale doesn't think he can find the right words anyway. Not here, not now. What he settles on is eloquent, and he hopes it portrays all of the feeling he puts behind it:

"What took you so long?"

Bucky's grin widens. He shrugs his shoulders up to his ears and gestures back towards the poor excuse of a plane.

"We took a detour," he says simply.

Gale's hands find their way to his hips, and he knows he must look like a chastising wife stood like this. "We have formations for a reason. There's a procedure t-"

"*Procedure*, pfft," Bucky interrupts. He's still smiling. Gale wonders if he can taste the blood that's made it's way to his lips. Bucky claps Gale on the arm and makes his way to the interrogation truck without another word.

Gale turns back towards the plane, walks towards it through the smoke, and runs a gentle hand along it's underside. He's not entirely sure why he does this, some form of silent thank you, or prayer. He doesn't know who he's praying to.

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Later, when the high of his relief has fizzled out, it's replaced with nothing but the need to see Bucky alive once more. His skin burns with worry that his injuries were more serious than they thought, that he'll find him, face down, blood caked in his hair. It's happened before, to men that had been declared healthy but been found dead not even a few hours later.

He finds him sat on his bed, propped up against the wall. That book's back in his hand, the cover folded over the rear so he only needs the one to hold it. His other arm is tucked behind his head.

Bucky looks over as he approaches. His skin is stained slightly red, like he hasn't washed the blood off properly. He places the book open, face down, on his chest, and grins at Gale. Buck can see the gum he's chewing caught between his teeth.

He looks fine.

"Are you hurt?" Gale asks when he gets close enough, the words pushed out by the buzzing of his skin.

Bucky turns his head, squeezes his right eye closed so Buck can get a good look at the damage.

Gale takes his chin in his hand, turning him towards better light. There's a nasty cut that runs from his ear to his temple, but that seems to be the worst of it. He holds him for a moment longer than he should, and then let's go.

"You got lucky," is all he can bring himself to say.

John shakes his head with a smile, "it was all skill."

Buck rolls his eyes, but it's fond.

"You do anything like that again, I'll shoot you down myself," he jokes. It's easy this, easier to eat into John's playful demeanour than tell him any of the thoughts that live in his brain every time he's gone a second too long.

"You'd have to catch me first." Bucky's response is as fast as he flies.

"You think I can't catch you?"

"Not with the way you fly," he teases.

Gale nods, feigning consideration. "You're right. I don't need to catch

you. You'd take yourself out eventually."

Bucky tips his head back and laughs. His throat is left open, vulnerable, and something stirs inside of him at the sight.

"Was that a joke?" John asks, incredulous, breathless. "Did *Major Gale Cleven* just make a *joke*?"

He's still grinning, and Gale is suddenly hit with so much relief that he's here, and alive, and still smiling, that he can't bring himself to say anything. He just smiles back, pats Bucky on the shoulder, and leaves him to it. He doesn't trust what he might say if he opens his mouth. He doesn't think he could bite the words back from behind his teeth.

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With his wreckage of another B-17 bringing him to the lead of Lemmon's board, Bucky insists they celebrate.

"But Buck, I'm a *winner*," he had repeated, his arm across Gale's chest as he lent to beg in his ear.

"You're a menace," Buck had replied, but his resolve had quickly faltered with John so close.

Now, Gale was sat at a table of the bar they had found, watching as Bucky danced and sang and flirted with any pretty girl who landed in his line of sight. He was loud, unrelenting, so deliciously alive.

I never saw the sun shining so bright,

Never saw things going so right,

He watches Bucky gasp and rip his attention away from the girl who had been twirling her hair at him for the past few minutes. Instead, his eyes land on Gale.

"It's my song!" He shouts, earning looks from a few other tables. "Buck! This is my song!"

Buck raises his glass in encouragement as Bucky starts to belt out the lyrics. His eyes close, he leans his head back, once again Gale watches his throat as the words tumble out.

Noticing the days hurrying by,

When you're in love, my how they fly.

“Oi,” a voice from behind him calls out. “Call off your dog, why don’tcha.”

Gale’s blood runs cold, rivalling the ice in his drink.

He turns slowly, and finds a man sat at the table behind him. He’s older, looks mean, and he was fixing Bucky with a look Gale didn’t like.

“My what?” Gale asks, his voice low.

“Your *dog*,” the man repeats, and he points with a sneer at Bucky. “He’s-“

Buck doesn’t get the end of the sentence, because his glass very quickly finds its home in the side of the man’s face.

Things move quite fast after that. There’s an uproar, commotion, a bartender shouting. At some point John gets his arm around Gale’s chest and pulls him out of the bar and down the street.

They run for a while, Bucky laughing, Buck fuming, before Bucky trips and almost falls, bringing the both of them to a stop.

“What’d he say?” Bucky asks, his hands on his knees as he pulls in gasps of air.

Call off your dog.

Gale shakes his head, his hands on his hips to let the air fill his lungs. “Nothing.”

He tries to keep on walking but Bucky catches him with a hand on his stomach.

“Oh no no no, if *you* hit someone they must have said something real good. What was it?” Bucky hasn’t removed his hand, doesn’t seem like he will until Gale answers. He’s stood so close, still panting. Buck can feel the heat radiating from his hand through his uniform. When, still, Gale doesn’t answer, Bucky moves even closer, amused, as if he can crowd it out of him, his eyebrows raised expectantly. “Hm?”

Gale kisses him.

It’s quick, unplanned, and certainly not his best. It lands on the corner of John’s mouth.

Bucky's face falls. He says nothing. Gale takes his opportunity to veer around him and keep walking into the night. His lungs are burning, his chest still heaving, but now for an entirely different reason.

He hears Bucky's quick footsteps behind him and soon a hand is closing around his forearm and spinning him back around. He's talking before he can stop himself, before Bucky can have the chance to hit him or turn him down.

"I thought you were dead," he says, staring at the space where John's throat disappears into his uniform. "Earlier, I thought you were – *no record*, you were gone."

Bucky doesn't say anything. He doesn't let go of Gale's arm, either.

"You are so reckless," Buck continues, "you scare the hell out of me and I don't even have to fly with you. You don't follow procedure, you think all of this is a game and –"

He breaks his arm from John's grip and shoves him hard in the chest. He's looking him in the eye now. Bucky's silent resolve is working its way under Gale's skin and before he knows it he's working himself up, unable to claw himself back over the edge into calm.

"You were dead! For three hours! They asked me to pack up your things." Just like that, his anger turns into an indescribable sadness. He has to look away, can't look at Bucky without seeing the flames, and the parachute, and the nothingness in the air.

"I'm alive," Bucky says, finally, his voice thick.

Buck sniffs, shakes his head.

"I'm alive," Bucky says again. This time his voice is closer, more sure. Tentative hands land on Gale's shoulders. "Can you feel this?"

The weight does help. Buck takes a deep breath and nods.

"And this?" The hands slide slowly upwards until they're resting on either side of his jaw.

Slowly, Gale shifts his gaze up to meet John's.

"And this?" Bucky says again, quietly, so close he can taste it.

And then he kisses him. It's as soft as an apology but Gale feels the full weight of it anyway. Bucky tastes like whiskey and metal, like risk

and survival. His eyes drift close, his hands come up to hold tightly onto the lapel of Bucky's jacket. He can feel the other man's racing heart against his knuckles.

They stay like that for a while, kissing gently in the street. At any moment they could be seen, but there's a war on, and Gale has bigger things to worry about.

Bucky breaks it first, his eyes still closed as he rests his forehead against Gale's.

"Do I feel alive yet?" He asks.

"Almost," Buck says, and pulls them back together again.

End Notes

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